

# Columbia Downtown Focus Group

Minutes from Meeting February 22, 2006

Issued: March 10, 2006

## Minutes of Focus Group Meeting February 15, 2006

DPZ noted that minutes are not yet ready for distribution

### Review of Agenda and Handouts

- DPZ provided attendees with the following handouts:
  - Preliminary Draft Implementation Strategies
- Pat Laidig presented a letter from Town Center Village Board about affordable housing for Downtown, supporting 10% moderate income / 10% middle income, based on the Howard County median income
- What is the County's current proposal and how is low income housing provided for?  
*DPZ Reply:* Steve Lafferty described the current status of the County's affordable housing proposal and the Interfaith Coalition proposal (see the Affordable Housing FAQ). The proposal is not geared to low income; Housing and Community Development already has programs to address that population.

### Implementation Strategies

Steve Lafferty reviewed key points from the preliminary draft document.

*DPZ Followup:* **Key Strategies for Major Roads and Intersections** (page 3) contains an error. Strategy 2.2 incorrectly states the intent to "Fund design and engineering of the widening of Governor Warfield Parkway eastbound to the UD 29 ramps." It should read: "...the widening of Little Patuxent Parkway eastbound..." This proposed transportation improvement is correctly described at the top of page 3 in bullet 3.

### TRANSPORTATION

- Who would fund the road construction?  
*DPZ Reply:* Developers fund the first tier (internal roads). Developer and County pay for second tier (major roads), depending on APFO requirements. Typically, excise tax (developer dollars) pays for the improvements since road improvements are not highly funded by capital budget.
- Could the County impose stricter requirements for developer contribution?  
*DPZ Reply:* That could take further regulatory changes and public review. APFO goes beyond Town Center, so changes would affect the entire County.
- This does not read like implementation plan because does not include phasing.  
*DPZ Reply:* Phasing addresses short term topics for which we have details, staff yet to address medium to long term yet, but is not concerned as mechanisms are in place to address these issues when the time comes.
- Don't have data evidence yet that the roads system works (computer modeling).  
*DPZ Reply:* Glatting Jackson is studying build-out projections and road network, their findings will be incorporated into the Master Plan before it is submitted to the Planning Board.
- Plan should not proceed if the traffic study is not ready for the PB.
- Strategies do not address pedestrian crossings.  
*DPZ Reply:* Will be addressed in the next draft.

- Is mall a fifth district, is that traffic being considered in studying the road impact?  
*DPZ Reply:* Mall existing and expansion area will be considered in the traffic analysis. It will be included in the Master Plan as the fifth district.
- Road excise tax needs to be increased, Montgomery County requires \$4.50 retail, \$5.00 office, residential high rise \$1.03 per square foot.  
*DPZ Reply:* County will probably propose an increase in 2007, (last increase was in 1992).
- Excise Tax has enabled the County to do several important road improvements; a significant increase would inflate office rents and depress the office market.
- How much excise tax is already earmarked? How much has been spent? How much has been collected?  
*DPZ Reply:* DPZ will get that data and report back to the Focus Group.
- Concern about transit demand analysis not being done until after plan approved  
*DPZ Reply:* The County has transit service now. The upcoming Transportation Development Plan will do medium to long range projections.
- The strategies address the short term and offer a process for long term. Need to reassess long term as part of a process, need to be flexible so can accommodate future changes.
- Realize that the State will not have major funds available for transportation improvements.

#### WATER AND SEWER

- How does sewer maintenance fit into this? Could storm drain improvements be part of the plan?
- Is it true that sewer treatment is twice capacity needed as water treatment?  
*DPZ Reply:* Yes, infiltration and leakage into sewer pipes causes the need for more water treatment.
- Does anyone know how much money will be needed for all the infrastructure improvements?  
*DPZ Reply:* Revenues coming in will help balance the costs. We can estimate revenues; most improvements will be developer-funded. Road costs will probably be the largest cost. Glatting/ Jackson will be asked to address infrastructure costs in their post-charrette traffic analysis. If the high range of development does not work from a transportation viewpoint, the development proposal will be reduced. We need to add assumptions about Mall redevelopment, allocations of uses and phasing of Downtown development. Residential phasing will be based on the APFO housing allocations (determined through 2011). Phasing and allocations for 2020 and 2030, will be done with General Plan 2010.

#### SCHOOLS

- Did neighboring villages' projections get studied with Town Center projections?  
*DPZ Reply:* Yes, HCPSS is tracking student yields closely and is taking it into account in their capital budget and in the APFO open / closed chart.
- Will County buy the downtown school site?
- School could contribute to Downtown vibrancy, glad to see reservation proposal.

#### FIRE AND RESCUE (AND CIVIC/COMMUNITY USES)

- Are we reserving land for a Fire Station site or other civic uses or could we get a new site through a land swap?  
*DPZ Reply:* Fire and Rescue Services has a site and would be able to swap. The County has not yet considered purchasing any other sites, don't believe we need senior center. According to the County's Office on Aging, creating livable, walkable communities is more important to aging in place than is building senior centers as destinations. Does the

group think we need a “Slayton House?” Does Oakland serve as a Downtown village center? Is it intended for the site on the west end of Symphony Woods?

- Is a community center needed? Who will fund it? Columbia Association? Would a site be dedicated or acquired? Can it occur in open space at the Community College?

*DPZ Reply:* County has not typically built Community Centers, Columbia Association has.

- Athletic clubs can play role as community center, may be able to use existing facilities and enhance or improve places like the Library rather than build new.
- What about child care?
- Make sure our mind set is not the suburban one about new sites and new buildings. Need to think about multiuse buildings (schools).

#### LIBRARY

- What is status of current planning?

*DPZ Reply:* 2010 would be when staff could shift to the Miller Branch or a new library.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Most Focus Group members want 10% / 10% MIHU, not 15%. Town Center should have higher ratios than Route 1 CAC/TOD districts. The scale of Town Center makes it appropriate and now is the time to do it. The density has increased from 1,600 to 3,200 or 5,500. This has been the most passionate issue for the Focus Group (and was important to almost all groups at Charrette), affordable housing is important to County’s economic viability.
- GGP’s petition for The Crescent included at 5% housing component because Columbia already provides so much affordable housing. 73% of the County’s affordable housing is in Columbia. Last year the community requested 15 % and agreed to accept 10%. The requested quantity keeps increasing. 15% of 3,000 is more affordable housing than 5 or 15% of 1,600. Affordable housing must consider the cost of unit and cost of maintenance.
- If you work in Columbia, should be able to live there. Focus on need for low income. Middle income is foreign to the concept of giving priority where there is the greatest need.
- Look for creative solutions. Maybe others could help serve the need. Howard County Hospital or HCPSS could provide mechanisms for affordable housing for their workers. Should have increased density to provide more units as incentive (on top of the base percentage).
- Need to serve needs of those in the community that have less than \$50,000 income (25%+ of the people in the County).
- Rouse had social purpose and made profit, he was a proponent of 10%.
- Montgomery County is an example, they grant density bonus to increase % of affordable housing.
- 10% / 10% is a modest proposal given the need for housing to match jobs. Should provide full spectrum of housing (10% / 10% is artificial).

#### NOISE

- Need to notify people that are buying in a concert venue area, think outside the box.
- Can not sound proof balconies.
- Police helicopter is more a problem than music.

*DPZ Reply:* DPZ will continue to do noise research.

#### ENVIRONMENT

- What about traffic noise and air pollution?

## DOWNTOWN MANAGEMENT

- Tax Increment Financing is a great tool. Can County do it?  
*DPZ Reply:* Do not know if we have the authority, there has not yet been the will to use it.

## PHASING

- Where will phasing be defined and committed?  
*DPZ Reply:* Zoning and Adequate Public Facilities regulations can be used to establish phasing.
- Each phase should have infrastructure requirements tied to it.  
*DPZ Reply:* We can set thresholds for improvements. Gateway is an example. Establish thresholds with development phase. We will have more direction from the Glatting Jackson report. APFO allocations are a huge residential phasing mechanism, schools also pace it.
- Does phasing apply to uses and districts? Can you require certain balance of uses? Can you require one type of use be provided before you can continue to build out a particular use?  
*DPZ Reply:* County is working on structuring the balancing of uses as a part of phasing.
- High rise construction needs all allocations to build a building, can't phase a high rise building.

## ZONING

- DPZ described the concept behind the Zoning amendment proposal. The issue is a complex one because of grandfathering of existing uses that will continue.
- Four elements:
  - NT amendment to allow overlay district for Downtown.
  - Map the district via a zoning case (2007).
  - Update all NT district regulations (2007+).
- Process Steps and Plan types.
  - Now require submission of a Preliminary Development Plan, Comprehensive Sketch Plan, Final Development Plan and Site Development Plan.
  - New process would require a detailed Downtown Development Plan with Development Criteria, then a SDP.
- Open Space requirements would be the current 36%, with 5% urban amenity areas.
- Would require SDP criteria to be used by the Planning Board. The Zoning Board will approve development criteria with DDP.
- Pre-submission Community meetings will be required as well as Village Board review of all proposal.
- Neither PB nor VB have considerable design expertise, but with design guidelines their review should be more effective.
- Grandfathering existing and in-process projects (so not non-conforming) until major changes are proposed to a building or site.
- Focus Group expressed a strong sentiment for an architectural review board as part of Master Plan proposal.
- Will architectural drawings need to be submitted at SDP review for the Planning Board? Who reviews them?  
*DPZ Reply:* Focus at SDP is on architecture and site plans. Concept architecture should be shown at the presubmission presentation.
- Is Village Board really qualified to review?  
*DPZ Reply:* Could architects attend those meetings and volunteer to make comments.

- An architectural review board would be more valuable than PB.
- Is GGP internal architecture review an appropriate venue?
- This system has led to failures, response to financial issues and developer pressures.
- Design professionals should advise the PB. An architectural review board should help on Route 1, Route 40 and be Countywide.
- Do not do away with the PB. It serves important function and citizens forum. Need ARB as well. Fee for ARB review should fund the process.
- Presubmission review attracts a large audience and had positive effect on plaza residences.
- Town Center is not just a village, it's important to all Columbia and Howard County, need professional input, not emotional testimony. It needs to be focused. Town Center Village Board should focus perhaps on residential uses.
- Businesses have no say in the Village Board review process. Only GGP has review of new commercial buildings.
- Town Center Village Board can provide informal review, ask questions, ARB has different and important role.
- You get community input when go to Planning Board, get some community input at Village Board.
- Focus Group advice about affordable housing and Design Advisory Panel has not influenced the Downtown planning process.
- Who gets to build the 5,000 units? Where do they go and what is the size of each building? Will GGP control it all? Other property owners need right to participate in planning and make decisions and use density.  
*DPZ Reply:* Need to reserve some development rights for other properties in the future when they are ready to redevelop.
- Others should be able to come in with zoning request and petition.  
*DPZ Reply:* Zoning will allow private property owners to make requests, how will get together with GGP on the petition.
- What happens to existing owners who have private covenants and restrictions? Do those private covenants need to be dissolved?
- GGP is not interested in releasing covenants.

### **Schedule for February 27 Meeting**

- DPZ handed out the following: Agenda for February 27 Public Meeting, Facilitators Work Sheet, Buzz Group Questionnaire, Exit Survey Questionnaire.
- People will be so tired from the DPZ presentations they will be overwhelmed and won't be prepared for buzz groups.
- People need time to really absorb before they respond.
- Need DPZ to acknowledge what they heard and how they responded.
- Charrette participants mistrust the buzz group process because they do not believe what they said came through at the charrette.
- Voice of public should not be filtered through a buzz group and a spokesperson.

## **Attendees**

### **Focus Group**

Bobo, Liz  
Brown, Maggie  
DeVerneil, Andre  
Gray, Karen  
Hekimian, Alex (Mary Pivar)  
Hollis, Robert  
Kirsch, Phil  
Laidig, Patricia  
McCord, Nancy  
Miller, Dennis  
Mugane, Bridget  
Parrish, Jane  
Richardson, Lee  
Saleem, Mohammad  
Sosinski  
Talkin, Richard  
Tennenbaum, Robert  
Tousey, Hugh

### **Press**

Blakely, Andrei  
Boehl, Brian (The View)  
DeFord, Susan  
Peluso, Paul (The View)

### **Public**

Adams, Carolyn  
Broida, Joel  
Cole, Ray  
Coren, Evan  
Dunbar, Harry  
England, Brian  
Heltzer, Josh  
Howell, Sherman  
Ketley, Jeanne  
Klein, Alan  
Knowles, Lloyd  
LaPine, Chuck  
McLaughlin, Jo  
Meskin, Stephen  
Ross, William A., Sr.  
Seidel, Mary Ruth  
Sigaty, Mary Kay  
Walter, Ed  
Yesley, Joel

### **DPZ**

McLaughlin, Marsha  
Lafferty, Stephen  
Hilsenrath, Mina  
Mackey, Bill  
Blaumanis, Dace  
Clay, Randy

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